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LB 1092

think that they shouldn't cut out the small and medium size producers out of interstate commerce just because their meat is processed by a state plant. If their meat is just as safe, just as healthy, and just as much care has been taken in slaughtering, processing and packaging that meat, it would be a great way to allow small to medium size producers to direct market across the country. In your handout you also have a real short e-mail, it's on the green sheet, from the small producers in Bassett, Nebraska, who see LB 1092 as a wonderful opportunity for small producers to market their...to direct market their beef. Currently, I've been told in Bassett the closest USDA plant is 140 miles away. They have a number of local lockers, but those are all custom-exempt plants. That means if you want your animals slaughtered for resale you have to truck that animal 150 miles away. I think that highlights the fact that while, yes, anyone could be federally inspected, generally, federal inspection programs work best for large plants. As the news release from Minnesota pointed out, small plants don't have the resources that large plants have. It's difficult for small processors to stay up-to-date on food handling procedures and technologies. A state meat inspection can help small lockers develop the best programs for them. They can look at a more customized program. They also act as consultants, not just inspectors. That's one issue that came up when discussing this with the local lockers. Why don't they go federally inspected? Well, they said, we just feel more comfortable working with a state program; we feel more comfortable working with our local people in our local community. There is a perception that the USDA inspectors don't care about small lockers. I'm not saying they aren't running a good federal program, but companies like IBP and Monfort own most of Nebraska's USDA plants. Companies like IBP and Monfort own most of Nebraska's USDA plants and these are exactly the kind of companies that can end up hurting our small producers. If you think back to the hog crisis in 1998, the prices in the grocery stores for pork didn't drop much. What dropped was the price that our farmers were getting paid for their livestock. If we had a state meat inspection program where people could take their animal to a local locker, have their animal processed and turn around and sell that meat in their local grocery stores, we could have seen much more money stay in Nebraska. Consumers are willing to pay the normal price for ham, bacon and pork chops, but the large packing